

CHAPTER XIV

ARTICLE XIII.—*Of Prayer.*—We believe that we are encouraged to draw near to God, our Heavenly Father, in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and on our own behalf and that of others to pour out our hearts humbly yet freely before Him, as becomes His beloved children, giving Him the honor and praise due His holy name, asking Him to glorify Himself on earth as in heaven, confessing unto Him our sins and seeking of Him every gift needful for this life and for our everlasting salvation. We believe also that, inasmuch as all true prayer is prompted by His Spirit, He will in response thereto grant us every blessing according to His unsearchable wisdom and the riches of His grace in Jesus Christ.

This great topic is handled in this article, wholly from the point of view of experience. Technical points of Dogmatic or Apologetic are not touched on. (Guidance on the whole subject, with copious bibliography, may be had from the late Dr. Hastings in his book on prayer, in the series of volumes entitled "Great Christian Doctrines.") The aspects, under which the exercise of prayer is considered in the article are: (1) Our warrant for prayer. We draw near to God, because He is our "heavenly Father." "I bow my knees," says Saint Paul, "unto the Father." And Jesus uses a simple yet mighty argument to encourage our hearts in prayer—"How much more shall your heavenly Father!" How much more beneficently, wisely, liberally! (2) Our plea in prayer. We sinners dare draw near to the Holy Father, because His father-love has been manifested in all its reconciling sin-forgiving quality

in Jesus Christ, His Son, in whom we also are children of God. Not in our name, therefore, but in His, we come, sure that nothing can bar our "access to the Father." (3) The prompting and the power of prayer. We are not left to ourselves when we pray. Prayer is an activity of the Divine life in us. We pray in the Spirit. Through Christ, in the Spirit, we have our access. And as we pour out our hearts before God, it is the Spirit, who helps our infirmities, and replaces our ignorance, and in the deep places of our souls, where no human friend dare enter, "the spirit itself maketh intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered." (4) The qualities of Prayer. (a) Humility, as of frail sinful creatures, addressing the Creator the Holy one, making no claim for themselves, casting themselves on the mercy of God in Christ. (b) Filial confidence, as of those, who are not trembling slaves, but children, beloved of the Father, and glad to tell Him all that is in their hearts, not afraid that He will misunderstand them, or reject them. (5) The Parts of Prayer. These are not named, but are implied (a) Adoration, with which the reverent worshipper instinctively begins. (b) Confession of sins, which naturally follows, as the soul sees itself in the light of the Divine holiness. (c) Petition, which flows from a sense of need, in things temporal and things spiritual. (d) Intercession, which is the highest work of prayer, and is the proper exercise of the priesthood which belongs to all believers. We are to pray not only on our own behalf, but on

behalf of others; and the scope of our desire is the glorifying of the Father by every human soul the world over. (e) Thanksgiving, which is a part of every believing prayer, for faith rejoices in the munificence of God. (6) Answer to Prayer. There are many reflex benefits, which come from prayer, and make the exercise of prayer very precious. But it is remarkable, as Dr. Hastings points out, that our Lord's emphasis falls on the assurance that the prayer of faith will be answered. His assurances, indeed, are staggeringly comprehensive (Gordon's "Quiet Thoughts on Prayer" is very full on this point). In truth, the Father gives us "good things" according to His wisdom and love; and perhaps not the least blessing is His withholding of things we were sure were "good," and ignorantly demanded. We cannot dictate to God. We cannot limit Him. Strictly speaking, there are no unanswered prayers, though the answer may be far beyond, and far other than, what we expected.